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ABSTRACT

Historically, ethnic minorities have been represented at the bottom of the economic and social order putting minority children and adolescents particularly at risk for psychological disorders and behavioral problems. As the population of minority youth increases it becomes clear that there is a need for educational and therapeutic interventions that are culturally relevant for this population. Minority families often exert strong pressures on members not to reveal personal matters to "strangers" or to "outsiders." It has been suggested that the therapeutic tool of bibliotherapy be considered an innovative approach for working with children who may perceive "talk therapy" as threatening. When using bibliotherapy with minority clients, it is necessary to select culturally relevant books that reflect the reader's experiences and provide models that promote identification. Providing books that reflect a child's worldview, similar family structures, environments, and language, and that portray ethnic pride will assist in providing culturally sensitive bibliotherapy. The counselor can use bibliotherapy in individual or group settings. Books can help children cope with many of life's problems. Through bibliotherapy, readers can see themselves as aligned with characters, situations, and experiences that give them a sense they are not alone. (A list of books which focuses on African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic ethnic/racial groups is included. Approximate reading levels by age are noted with key descriptors of the subject.) (ABL)

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Culturally Relevant Bibliotherapy: Meeting the Needs of Minority Children

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Culturally Relevant Bibliotherapy: Meeting the Needs of Minority Children

Abstract

This article presents how bibliotherapy can be a culturally sensitive therapeutic tool to use with children of color. A brief description of the stages of bibliotherapy are discussed. Examples of using culturally relevant literature are provided and a reference list of books categorized by ethnicity.

Over the last several decades, the United States has witnessed a dramatic change in the cultural diversity of our population. The U.S. Census Bureau (1987) has reported that non-White youth (African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Hispanics) under the age of 18 will constitute 30% of the nation's population by the year 2000 and 38% by the year 2020. A study conducted by the College Board and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, estimated that one-third of the U.S. public school students will be from minority groups by 1995 (Denver Post, 1991).

Minority Children at Risk

The Children's Defense Fund (1987) noted that ethnic minority children are greatly disadvantaged by their ethnicity, poverty, and social isolation. Historically, ethnic minorities have been represented at the bottom of the economic and social order putting minority children and adolescents particularly at risk for psychological disorders and behavioral problems. (Ho, 1992 ; Gibbs & Huang, 1989). Brounstein, Hatry, Altschuler, and Blair (1990) stated that urban youth live in the midst of what has been named social stress, inner city stress, and environmental stress. The problems related to these types of stress are poverty, powerlessness, inadequate housing, poor

health, lack of access to mental health services, school dropout, and discrimination.

As the population of minority youth increases it becomes clear that there is a need for educational and therapeutic interventions that are culturally relevant for this population. The purpose of this paper is three-fold. First, to briefly discuss the influence of ethnicity on ones' worldview. Second, to provide an overview of the goals of bibliotherapy and how this therapeutic tool can be culturally relevant with children of color. Third, to provide a reference list of books that focuses on four racial/ethnic groups; African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic. In reviewing the literature on bibliotherapy and examining suggested books, it became apparent the majority of selected references depicted the majority Anglo culture. Hence, the need to compile a list of culturally relevant books. The reference list was compiled by reviewing books at libraries, bookstores, and reference guides such as the Bookfinder (Spredemann, 1981). The books listed cover an array of issues to assist the counselor in meeting the individual needs of minority clients.

The Influence of Ethnicity

Ho (1992) stated that ones' ethnicity influences the

manifestation of symptoms, coping mechanisms, and defensive styles. "Not only are children growing up in minority families exposed to different family structures and dynamics, school and neighborhood experiences, and community responses than children from mainstream Anglo families, but they also must cope with socioeconomic realities and barriers that profoundly limit their opportunities and negatively affect their normal development and mental health" (p.8).

Minority families often exert strong pressures on members not to reveal personal matters to "strangers" or "outsiders". Children may feel they will shame, stigmatize, or violate family ethics if they open up and discuss family matters. (Sue & Sue, 1991). When working with children who may perceive the use of "talk therapy" for assessment and treatment as threatening, Pardeck (1990) suggested that the therapeutic tool of bibliotherapy be considered as an innovative approach. When using bibliotherapy with minority clients, it is necessary to select culturally relevant books that reflect the reader's experiences and provide models that promote identification. Although the problems that minority and Anglo children are experiencing may be categorized similarly (e.g., self-esteem, divorce, death, sibling relationships, peer pressure, etc.), how

one perceives and manages problems through his or her worldview may be drastically different. As previously stated, ethnicity greatly influences how one thinks, copes, feels about life, death, physical, and mental illness. Within the worldview of minority children, oppression, discrimination, prejudice, and racism often complicate ones' ability not only to change situations, but also decrease self-worth and self-esteem. Hence, providing books that reflect a childs' worldview, similar family structures, environments, language, and portray ethnic pride will assist in providing culturally sensitive bibliotherapy.

Goals of Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy is defined in the Dictionary of Education as "the use of books to influence total development, a process of interaction between the reader and literature which is used for personality assessment, adjustment, growth, clinical and mental hygiene purposes; a concept that ideas inherent in selected reading material can have a therapeutic effect upon the mental or physical ills of the reader" (Good 1966, p.212).

The goals of bibliotherapy have been linked to the interdependent stages of psychotherapy (Bernstein & Rudman, 1989; Manning & Casbergue, 1988; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1984). In the first stage of identification, the reader identifies with the

character in a book who is experiencing similar problems. In the second stage, projection, the reader connects the character with his or her own emotions and meanings. Catharsis occurs in the third stage when the reader experiences an emotional release as the character of the story resolves a difficult situation. The final stage in this process is insight and integration. The reader gains personal insight into a problem and internalizes some of the coping behaviors of the character in the book.

To accomplish these goals, it is most important to select books that act as a mirror--reflecting and validating familiar cultures and experiences (Cox & Galda, 1990). Children need the opportunity to see themselves in their books.

Using Culturally Relevant Books

The counselor can use bibliotherapy in individual or group settings. In either situation, the counselor needs to select a book that presents a problem similar to that of the individual or group. In addition, the book should be age and reading level appropriate (Pardeck, 1990). The counselor can then initiate discussion of the topic and read a brief book or have the individual or group read a book before the session for reaction and discussion (Gladding & Gladding, 1991).

If the counselor is working with an African American student

or a group of African American students who are experiencing problems related to school, the book Sometimes I Don't Like School (Hogan, 1980), can assist in looking at how George uses avoidance tactics to deal with difficulties at school. George is African American and the pictures show ethnically diverse classmates and teachers. He eventually resolves his problem with the help of a teacher and parent. The counselor can initiate a discussion on the difficulties the student/s may be having similar to George and how they deal with those situations. Brainstorming can follow the discussion to explore other options for dealing with difficult school problems.

Children of color in a predominately white school may experience prejudicial and racial remarks. They may feel isolated not fitting the "norm" of the school resulting in lowered self-esteem and possibly repressed anger. We Adopted You, Benjamin Koo (Girard, 1989) is the story of a Korean boy who was adopted into an American family. The story depicts his experiences of not only being adopted and not knowing his real mother, but also being culturally different. In the story Benjamin states, "I do have one problem. A few kids call me "Chink"....I don't like him I heard a girl say, he's Japanese. It hurts me when kids tease me or talk about me like I'm an alien

from the moon". Even though Ben has assimilated into the majority culture, he still experiences the hurt of being "different". Ben shares his feelings and the way he copes with racism which may assist other children of color in dealing with being culturally different than the majority.

Children who are new to the United States and still very traditional in their culture may not only experience prejudice but also the difficulty of fitting into two different cultures. Studies have indicated that relocation can be very stressful for children (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983; Hisama, 1980). Berry (1980) referred to this stress as "acculturative stress". Ho (1992) has suggested that relocation may exacerbate conflicts related to normal development; such as self-concept, identity conflicts, and independence.

Sundara, a Cambodian refugee, is the main character in Children of the River (Crew, 1989). She has been relocated to Oregon, leaving her parents, brother, and sister behind. Living with her traditional Cambodian aunt, Sundara struggles to fit into school and be a "good Cambodian girl"-one who never dates and waits for her family to arrange her future marriage. The story presents insight into the emotional difficulties of life between two cultures. It is important that the counselor

understand the cultural values, belief systems, and societal norms of Asian traditional culture (Ho, 1992) to assist children in adapting to a new culture while maintaining their cultures of origin.

A societal problem that occurs across all ethnic, socioeconomic, and family types is child abuse. Barth and Derezotes (1990), however, found that it is unevenly distributed across places and poulations. Families and children suffering the most social strain are most likely to suffer abuse.

Pardeck (1990) indicated that abused children often have difficulty developing relationships and feel threatened to verbally discuss their situations. Using a book such as Jason's Story: Going to a Foster Home (Anderson & Finnes, 1986), may illicit emotional responses from the abused child that can be discussed with a counselor or expressed through art, drama, or play. Jason was removed from his mother's home after Social Services investigated reported bruises on Jason. The mother had lost her job and was drinking heavily. "Jason believed he was a bad boy. He thought that his mother believed he was bad too". This book, about a young African American boy, not only presents a home under stress but also the emotions, feelings, and behaviors related to that stress. The book explains what foster

care is and provides a glossary of words for children to know in those situations.

Conclusion

Books can help children cope with many of life's problems. Bernstein and Rudman (1989) stated that people are said to identify when they behave or imagine themselves behaving like other individuals with whom they have made a connection. Through bibliotherapy, readers can see themselves as aligned with characters, situations, and experiences that give them a sense they are not alone. Bibliotherapy exists as a tool to be used in the therapy process.

The following list of books has been compiled to focus on four racial/ethnic groups; African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic. They represent a wide range of issues being faced by children of various ages. To assist the counselor with book selection, an approximate reading level by age is noted along with key descriptors of the subject.

African American:

Blume, Judy (1970). Iggie's house. Dell. First Black family on the block, friendship. 9-12.

Boyd, Candy (1985). Forever friends. Puffin Books. Death of a friend. 4-6.

Branscum, Robbie (1977). The saving of P.S. Doubleday. Divorce and remarriage. 9-12.

Brooks, Bruce (1984). The moves make the man. Harper. Prejudice and emotional problems. 9-12.

Childress, Alice (1973). A hero ain't nothing but a sandwich. Avon Books. Drugs. 9-12

Clifton, Lucille (1977). Amifika. E.P. Dutton. Fear, absence of parent, African-American dialect. 5-7

Clifton, Lucille (1978). Everett Anderson's nine month long. Holt, Reinhart, & Winston. New baby, stepfather, family. 5-7.

Clifton, Lucille (1977). Everett Anderson's 1-2-3. Holt, Reinhart, & Winston. Remarriage, stepfather. 5-7

Clifton, Lucille (1983). Everett Anderson's goodbye. Henry Holt & Co. Death of father, 5 stages of grief. 6-8.

Clifton, Lucille (1975). My brothers fine with me. Holt, Reinhart, & Winston. Siblings, running away, African-

American dialect. 5-7.

Edwards, Pat (1988). Little John and Plutie. Houghton. Insecurity, self confidence through friendship. 9-12.

Greenfield, Eloise & Gilchrist, Jan (1991). Night on neighborhood street. New York: Dial Books. Selection of poems: Fear, families, unemployment, drugs. 6-9.

Grimes, Nikki (1977). Growin'. Dial Press. Death of father, loneliness, friendship, African-American dialect. 8-12.

Grimes, Nikki (1978). Something on my mind. Dial Press. Prejudice, racial identity. 5-8.

Herlicky, D. (1990). Ludie's song. Puffin Books. Prejudice and friendship. 9-12.

Hoffman, Mary & Bench, Caroline (1991). Amazing Grace. Dial Books. Self-determination. 6-9.

Hooks, William H. (1982). Circle of fire. Atheneum. Prejudice, friendship. 9-12.

Hurmence, Belinda (1982). A girl called boy. Clarion Books. Black identity. 9-12.

Keats, Ezra Jack (1968). A letter to Amy. Harper Trophy. Friendship. 6-9.

Keats, Ezra Jack (1967). Peter's chair. Harper Trophy. New baby, sibling rivalry. 6-9.

Klein, Norma (1983). Bizou. Viking. Bi-racial identity 9- 12.

MacKinnon, Bernie (1984). The meantime. Houghton Mifflin. Prejudice, moving to white suburbs. 9-12.

Mathis, Sharon Bell (1975). The hundred penny box. Puffin Books. Grandmothers, family life, love. 6-9.

Matthews, Ellen (1978). Getting rid of Roger. Westminster Press. Difficulty with sibling, single parent, mothers new friend. 8-10.

Mendez, Phil (1989). The black snowman. Scholastic, Inc. Christmas, brothers. 6-9.

Miles, Betty (1976). All it takes is practice. Alfred A. Kopf. Interracial marriage, prejudice, shyness. 9-12.

Miller, Ruth White (1977). The city rose. McGraw-Hill. Death, orphan, loneliness, prejudice, moving, new school, shyness. 10-12.

Moore, Emily (1982). Just my luck. Puffin Books. Friend moves, loneliness. 9-12.

Moore, Emily (1980). Something to count on. Puffin Books. Divorce. 9-12.

Myers, Walter Dean (1979). It ain't all for nothin'. Avon. Crime, values, adolescent alcoholism, honesty-dishonesty, unreliable parent. 10-13.

Myers, Walter Dean ((1982). Won't know till I get there. Puffin Books. Foster home care. 9-12.

Myers, Walter Dean (1991). Me, mop, and the sundance kid. Dell Publishing. Adoption, loss of friends. 9-11.

Nevfeld, John (1968). Edgar Allan. Phillips. Black child adopted by White family. 5-8.

Neville, Emily Cheney (1975). Garden of broken glass. Delacorte Press. Alcoholic mother, loneliness, friendship, ghetto life, some African-American dialect. 8-10.

Nolan, Madeena Spray (1978). My daddy don't go to work. Carolrhoda Books. Family unity, unemployment. 5-7.

Tate, Eleanora (1990). Thank you, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Bantam Skylark. Identity, Black pride. 9-12.

Taylor, Mildred (1989). The friendship and the gold cadillac. Bantam Skylark. Prejudice. 9-12.

Tester, Sylvia Root (1976). Billy's basketball. The Child's World. Sense of inferiority, loneliness, sibling relationship. 5-7.

Tobias, Tobi (1975). Arthur Mitchell. Thomas Y. Crowell. Prejudice, accepting responsibility, success. 8-10.

Tusa, Tricia (1991). MaeBelle's suitcase. MacMillian. Friendship. 6-9.

Udry, Janice May (1966). What Mary Jo shared. Scholastic Inc. Shyness. 6-9.

Wilkinson, Brenda (1975). Ludell. Harper Trophy. Poverty, search for a better life. 10-12.

Wilson, J. (1990). Robin on his own. Scholastic. Death of mother. 7-9.

American Indian:

Borland, Hal (1963). When the legends die. Harper. Ute: Problems growing up in Colorado. 9-12.

Bulla, Clyde Robert (1963). Indian hill. Harper. Navajo: Relocation from reservation to city. 8-10.

Carter, F. (1976). Education of Little Tree. University of New Mexico Press. Cherokee: Identity. 9-12.

Chandler, Edna Walker (1975). Indian paintbrush. Whitman & Co. Sioux: Move from city to reservation, death of father. 9-11.

Chief Seattle (1991). Brother eagle, sister sky. Dial Books. Caring for the environment. 6-9.

Clark, Ann Nolan (1991). In my mother's house. Viking Press. Life in a Pueblo. 6-9.

Clymer, Eleanor (1971). The spider, the cave, and the pottery bowl. Dell. Family, identity. 9-12.

Coates, Belle (1981). Mak. Houghton. Torn between cultures. 10-12.

Cone, Molly (1972). Number four. Brothers death, Indian identity. 10-12.

Conklin, Paul (1975). Choctaw boy. Dodd, Mead, & Co. Identity, torn between cultures, accepting change, loyalty. 9-12.

Dyer, T.A. (1979). The whipman is watching. Houghton. Retaining Indian identity in Anglo school. 5-8.

George, Jean Craighead (1983). The talking earth. Harper Trophy. Seminole: Identity. 9-12.

Gessner, Lynne (1977). Malcolm Yucca Seed. Harvey House. Torn between cultures, honesty-dishonesty, decision making. 8-10.

Goble, Paul (1978). The girl who loved horses. Aladdin Books. Navajo and Oglala Sioux: Legends, identity. 6-9.

Goble, Paul (1984). Buffalo woman. Aladdin Books. Sioux: Legend, identity. 6-9.

Goble, Paul (1991). The great race. Aladdin Books. Cheyenne and Sioux: Legends, identity. 6-9.

Griese, Arnold Alfred (1978). The wind is not the river. Expectations of others, fear, values. 9-12.

Hale, Janet Campbell (1991). The owl's song. Bantam Books.

Death, loneliness, prejudice. 9-12.

Haseley, Dennis (1983). The scared one. Warne. Indian boy living in fear. 9-12.

Hobbs, Well (1989). Bearstone. Avon Books. Living in group home, isolation, identity. 9-12.

Lampman, Evelyn Sibley (1976). The Potlach family. Atheneum Publishers. Alcoholic father, search for identity, pride. 10-12.

McDermott, Gerald (1974). Arrow to the sun. Puffin Books. Pueblo: History, identity. 6-9.

Miles, Miska (1971). Annie and the old one. Little, Brown, & Co. Grandmother's death. 6-9.

Pitts, Paul (1988). Racing the sun. Avon. Navajo: Cultural identity. 10-12.

Asian:

Bunting, Anne Evelyn (1978). Magic and the night river. Harper & Row. Japanese: Identity, grandparents, responsibility. 5-8.

Chang, Heidi (1988). Elaine, Mary Lewis and the frogs. Crown. Chinese: Moving, adjustment, identity. 8-10.

Coutant, Helen (1974). First snow. Knopf. Vietnamese: Adjustment to the U.S. 7-9.

Crew, Linda (1989). Children of the river. Dell Publishing. Cambodian. Refugee, adjustment, keeping traditional ways. 10-12.

Gilson, Jaimee (1985). Hello, my name is Scrambled Eggs. Pocket Books. Vietnamese: Refugee adjustment, friendship.

Kalman, Maira (1989). Sayonara, Mrs. Kackleman. Puffin Books. Japanese: Identity, Japanese words provided.

Lord, Bette Bao (1984). In the year of the boar and Jackie Robinson. Harper Trophy. Chinese: Moving, adjustment, new school.

Pfeffer, Susan Beth (1975). Marly the kid. Doubleday. Chinese: Poverty, prejudice, stepmother. 9-11.

Yashima, Taro (1976). Crow boy. Puffin Books. Japanese: Isolation due to ethnicity.

Yep, Lawrence (1975). Dragonwings. Harper Trophy. Chinese: Prejudice, moving. 9-12.

Yep, Lawrence (1977). Child of the owl. Harper Trophy. Father's illness, living with grandmother, identity, separation. 9-11.

Hispanic:

Cisneros, Sandra (1989). The house on Mango St. Vintage Books. Poverty, prejudice, identity. 8-10.

Colman, Hila Crayder (1975). That's the way it is, amigo. Crowell, Inc. Father's death, running away, friendship. 9-11.

George, Jean Craighead (1989). Shark beneath the reef. Harper Trophy. Dropping out of school. 9-12.

Gordon, Shirley (1978). Crystal is my friend. Harper & Row. Friendship, identity, loneliness. 7-9.

Krumgold, Joseph (1953). ...and now Miquel. Harper Trophy. Identity. 8-10.

Madison, Winifred (1971). Maria Luisa. Harper. Prejudice against Chicanos. 9-11.

Martel, Cruz (1976). Yaqua days. Dial Books. Puerto Rican: Families, use of Spanish in text, glossary of Spanish words.

Mohr, Nicholasa (1979). Felita. Dell Books. Puerto Rican: Moving, prejudice. 10-12.

Paulsen, Gary (1987). The crossing. Dell. Mexican: Illegal immigrant orphan. 9-11.

Smith, Nancy Covert (1975). Josie's handful of quietness. Abingdon Press. Friendship, prejudice, accepting expectations. 9-11.

Stolz, Mary Slattery (1978). Cider days. Harper & Row. Friendship, identity shyness, sibling rivarly. 8-10

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39, 7-13.

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Hisama, T. (1980). Minority group children and behavior disorders: The case of Asian American children. Behavior Disorders, 5, 186-196.

Ho, M.K. (1992). Minority children and adolescents in therapy. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hogan, P.Z. (1980). Sometimes I don't like school. Milwaukee: Raintree.

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